

Project overview:

Montana was among 45 states to be awarded a one-year planning grant focused on analyzing and strengthening early childhood systems, receiving \$4.2 million. The grant is funded with federal funding through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that was channeled through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Child Care.

Purpose: Developing the state's comprehensive early childhood system to support early learning and development, health, family support, and engagement. The system includes, but is not limited to programs such as child care, head start, home visiting, health, services for children with developmental disabilities, nutrition support, and maternal child health programs.

Five required activities of the grant:

1. Needs assessment
2. Strategic planning
3. Maximizing parental choice and knowledge
4. Sharing best practices among early care and education (ECE) providers
5. Improve overall quality of ECE

The needs assessment involved many stakeholders across the state through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. From the information gathered in the needs assessment and through strategic planning sessions across the state, a strategic plan has been created to provide direction for the early childhood system in Montana and to inform future grant opportunities. A draft has been submitted for approval from the federal government and will be available on the Department's website once approved.

Areas of focus include:

- Access to high quality early care and education, especially for infants/toddlers, children with special needs, rural and high poverty communities.
- Better coordination and alignment among child serving programs in areas such as professional development, referrals, common screening tools, transitions between programs and into school, support for families.
- Increased public awareness and consumer education related to the early childhood system and family support.
- Governance related to program coordination as well as the use of data to make cross program decisions and/or to align services for children and families.

RESOURCES

Please visit <https://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/montanaearlychildhoodsystem> for more information.

CONTACT

Jamie Palagi, Administrator, Human and Community Services Division, 444,6676, jpalagi@mt.gov
Patty Butler, Chief, Early Childhood Services Bureau, 444-1828, pbutler@mt.gov